

## REACTION TO THE FRENCH COLONIZATION OF INDO-CHINA

they are used to and which confirms their socio-political order. The only advantages which conversion offers in their eyes are material. Hence in studying the problem one must differentiate between abstract Christian ideals and Mission practice.

The rising materialism of the Annamites, a consequence of the French conquest, was regarded by the Mission as both an obstacle and an aid to conversions.

With the rich it is the burning desire to become even richer; with the poor it is the sharp prick of necessity which is increasing with the ever heavier public burdens. The spirit of insubordination, of absolute liberty, of disdain for good traditions, disorganizes families and perverts individuals. Any pretext is good enough for a young man to leave home. Married couples abandon each other without a thought for their children. Even our Christians do not escape this epidemic of insubordination and vagrancy..<sup>1</sup>

Like the administration with whom it had co-operated to destroy the traditional culture the Mission found that it had simultaneously demolished moral discipline and respect for authority—Confucianist and otherwise. On the other hand the current materialism was a two-edged sword. It might work to Mission advantage. Preoccupation with the things of this world was not wholly due to preference but to necessity. The prevalent misery of the masses is a *leitmotif* that runs through Mission reports. It caused seasonal displacements for work and this neutralized any effect the missionaries might have by lives of self-abnegation, toil, and even martyrdom. To make any headway at all the Mission had to adapt itself and make it worth the Annamites<sup>1</sup> while to convert themselves—not a high plane of appeal but an effective one. The Mission held a privileged position as landowner, dating from

the pre-conquest period. Rice-fields would tempt the kind-loving

Annamite as nothing else. The missionary, too, could be a good friend at court, and a powerful intermediary with the administration.

Many Annamite families pride themselves on having been converted to Christianity at the time of the conquest, and incidentally of having thus laid the basis of their fortunes. If some of them were massacred by the mandarins as French partisans, if subsequently the survivors' hopes of being treated as a privileged group were deceived, nevertheless many had profited by their perspicacity to see at an early stage which way the wind blew. Conversion statistics reflect accurately the Mission's influence, notably after security was assured and anti-clericalism influenced the government, and show that there was a vast

<sup>1</sup> *Societe des Missions-Etrangeres; Compte Rendu des Travattx* (Paris, 1907), p. aoo,